IN THE CLAIMS:

1.   (Previously presented) A method, in a data processing system, for making purchasing decisions for purchasing a product or service, comprising:

obtaining, in the data processing system, one or more rules identifying strategic purchasing policies;

obtaining, in the data processing system, one or more attributes for the product or service to be purchased; and

automatically making a decision, in the data processing system, to purchase the product or service from a vendor based on the one or more rules and the one or more attributes.

2.   (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the one or more rules include one or more rules directed to at least one of an identification of the types of products or services that are to be purchased over a specified period of time, preferred terms and conditions of purchases, preferred shipping or delivery policies, desired expiration times on orders, target purchase prices, thresholds for maximum purchase prices, target values for product/service or vendor quality metrics, rank orderings or relative weights for calculating tradeoffs among different product/service or vendor attributes, sets of products or services that may be substituted for each other, default policies for product returns, rank ordered or weighted lists of preferred vendors, preferred payment methods, and parameters used in automated price calculation algorithms.

3.   (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the one or more attributes includes at least one of a maximum price to be paid for the product or service, a maximum number of products for purchase, sets of products or services that may be substituted for each other, information about which sets of products or services are preferred, information such as rank orderings or weights for determining tradeoffs among imperfectly substitutable products or services, information for determining tradeoffs between product or service prices, order size, and delivery times, information for determining tradeoffs

between product or service prices and vendor preferences, and thresholds for minimum acceptable quality measures.

4.   (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the product or service is associated with a multi-attribute utility function that describes an interrelation between multiple attributes of the one or more attributes.

5.   (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the one or more attributes are dynamically set.

6.   (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the one or more attributes are fixed.

7.   (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein at least one of the one or more attributes is dynamically set and at least one of the one or more attributes is fixed.

8.   (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein a value of at least one of the one or more attributes is automatically set.

9.   (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein automatically making a decision to purchase the product or service from a vendor includes:
        automatically selecting a set of vendors from which the product or service may be purchased;
        automatically evaluating each vendor in the set of vendors; and
        automatically choosing a vendor from the set of vendors from which to purchase the product or service.

10.   (Original) The method of claim 9, wherein automatically selecting a set of vendors includes:
        obtaining history information regarding one or more vendors; and
        selecting the set of vendors from the one or more vendors based on the history information.

11.   (Original) The method of claim 10, wherein the history information includes at least one of a previous history of purchases from the vendor, a negotiation history with the vendor, and a fulfillment history with the vendor.

12.   (Original) The method of claim 9, wherein automatically selecting a set of vendors includes:

obtaining exogenous preference information for one or more vendors; and

selecting the set of vendors from the one or more vendors based on the exogenous preference information.

13.   (Original) The method of claim 12, wherein the exogenous preference information includes at least one of identification information of vendors to prefer, identification information of vendors to avoid, a rank ordering of vendors, and a rank ordering of vendors to prefer for the product or service.

14.   (Original) The method of claim 9, wherein automatically selecting a set of vendors includes:

obtaining interoperability mechanism information for one or more vendors; and

selecting the set of vendors from the one or more vendors based on the interoperability mechanism information.

15.   (Original) The method of claim 9, wherein automatically selecting a set of vendors includes:

obtaining information about one or more vendors from a third party; and

selecting the set of vendors from the one or more vendors based on the information obtained from the third party.

16.   (Original) The method of claim 9, wherein automatically evaluating each vendor in the set of vendors includes negotiating with each vendor for the purchase of the product or service based on the one or more rules and the one or more attributes of the product or service.

17. (Original) The method of claim 16, wherein negotiating with each vendor includes at least one of selecting vendors by comparing prices in vendor on-line catalogs with a maximum price attribute for the product or service, placing one or more bids in an auction, and haggling over terms of the purchase.

18. (Original) The method of claim 16, wherein negotiating with each vendor includes negotiating based on one or more negotiation parameters including at least one of:

a threshold on a maximum price to offer;

parameters of algorithms used to calculate the maximum price to offer;

thresholds on minimum acceptable quality;

how long before an end of an auction to stop attempts at obtaining a better deal;

preferred increments in price when making counteroffers;

preferences, weights, or rank orderings for evaluating tradeoffs among alternatives among substitutable products, product attributes, terms and conditions, delivery times or costs, and vendor attributes;

tunable parameters of algorithms used in calculating offers;

rank orderings of preferred algorithms to use with particular vendors; and

information about which negotiation protocols are supported by each vendor in the set of vendors.

19. (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising:

storing a record of the purchase.

20. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the method is implemented in a distributed data processing system.

21-48. (Withdrawn)